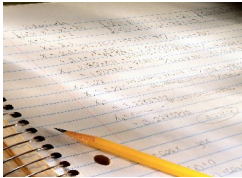


### **District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools: *Memphis City Schools***



Since the Office of Education Accountability first studied Memphis City Schools' high priority schools in 2001, the district has focused on improving its governance. The district has placed a large emphasis on district-wide reform, principal leadership, budgetary efficiencies, alternative sources of financial support, teacher recruitment and induction, truancy prevention, and technology use. In fact, although MCS was a High Priority System in 2005-06, the district is no longer identified as such.

In spite of its gains, MCS faces a multitude of challenging educational circumstances, such as:

- Concentrated poverty: 95 percent of the schools qualify for Title I funds, the federal grant program that allocates funds to school districts based on the number of students living below the poverty level
- High rates of student mobility: The district's mobility rate has slowly increased from 25 percent in 2001-02 to 30 percent in 2005-06.
- Budgetary constraints: For the past three school years, MCS has operated without any increase in its operating budget.

#### **Report Findings:**

- Despite establishing policy and support structures, MCS faces challenges in transferring district goals to school practice.
- MCS has made significant curriculum and governance changes to cope with student mobility.
- Facing budget shortfalls, the district focuses on efficiency and expanding sources of financial support.
- NCLB's Highly Qualified Teacher provision has created a need for more middle school teachers in MCS. In response, MCS partnered with various agencies to recruit and train more middle school teachers.
- MCS provides incentives for teachers who improve academic performance in high need schools.
- MCS revamped its approach to student behavior management and has implemented a comprehensive truancy prevention system that allows for earlier intervention and increased parental notification.
- MCS struggles to find an appropriate role in providing supplemental education services for students in underperforming schools.

**Over the past two years, MCS has created several systems to monitor school performance and establish internal accountability.**

#### **Recommendations for District Officials:**

- The district should maintain a steady focus on school-level capacity for and implementation of district-wide reform efforts.
- The district should study the issue of student mobility in Memphis in an attempt to coordinate interventions with city services
- The district should continue the established momentum focused on recruitment, retention, and leadership opportunities for high quality teachers.

**View the full report at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/cpdivorea.htm>**

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**Comptroller of the Treasury**